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ABSTRACT

The use of mass media as a means of learning a foreign language from the beginning of language study is discussed. Using the media enables many of the features of the natural language acquisition process to be brought into play in a way that much current language teaching material does not. This position is supported by recent research into the processes of reading and listening. The paper also discusses some of the ways in which activities preceding or accompanying the use of media texts can make the texts accessible to a wide variety of learners, including beginners. Beginners can be helped not only to understand foreign language texts but also to create and edit their own texts at a relatively sophisticated level. This approach greatly enriches the comprehensible linguistic input while also reducing affective barriers to language learning. A practical exercise built around an Italian news story and using four newspaper articles and one radio broadcast transcript in Italian as the basis for a series of activities is appended. (Author/MSE)

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Learning a foreign language through the media

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LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE THROUGH THE MEDIA

by

Seán M. Devitt

0 INTRODUCTION

Using the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television) as a means of learning a foreign language is now accepted as normal enough for advanced learners; and examination syllabuses in modern languages in Ireland and elsewhere now prescribe the use of media texts as an integral part of the programme. But at what stage should we begin to use media texts? Most language teachers would probably feel that the media can be profitably used for language learning only after the learner has already reached a considerable linguistic competence; this would generally be taken to mean after about four years' study of the language. Even then many teachers would consider that only the better students would be able to cope. In other words, the ability to use the media is seen as the end of a long process of language learning. Very few teachers would consider it possible to expose beginners to the media in a foreign language.

This paper, however, will present arguments for using the media from the very beginning of the process of language learning. I will argue that

using the media enables many features of the natural acquisition process to be brought into play in a way that much current language teaching material does not. This position will be supported by reference to some recent research into the processes of reading and listening. I will then go on to discuss some of the ways in which activities that precede or accompany the use of media texts can make these texts accessible to a wide variety of learners, including beginners. I will illustrate that not only can beginner-learners be helped to understand foreign language texts but that they can be helped to create their own texts and edit them at a quite sophisticated level. Such an approach, it will be argued, is not only possible but to be recommended, since it greatly enriches the comprehensible linguistic input (see Krashen 1981, p.62) while at the same time reducing the affective barriers to language learning.

Let us begin by considering the findings of research into first and second language acquisition.

1 THE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS

Much of the recent research into language acquisition has concentrated on the linguistic output of the learner. This output might be termed the "what" of language acquisition. Research in this area has established that there are so-called "natural orders of acquisition" for certain elements of languages, or "developmental stages" through which learners pass in the acquisition of aspects of languages. Other research has looked at what might be called the "where" and "with whom" of language acquisition, the contexts in which language acquisition takes place: it has examined the linguistic input to which the learner is exposed, the interactions he or she takes part in, his or her psychological and/or social distance from the target language community, etc. Both types of research have as their ultimate objective to gain insights into "how" and "why" language acquisition takes place. Information about the facts of language acquisition and its context is rightly considered to be an essential prerequisite for making claims about how and why language acquisition takes place. We will look very briefly at the major findings of this research, since it is to serve as a backdrop for our discussion of the use of media texts.

1.1 Studies of the learner's linguistic output

1.1.1 First language

In the area of first language acquisition Roger Brown (1973), in his now classic study of three unacquainted children (called Adam, Eve and Sarah for research purposes) found that all three passed through five clearly identifiable stages in their acquisition of English. Brown named the stages as follows:

STAGE 1: Relations or roles within the simple sentence.

Stage 1 was characterised by the use of, first, single words (or "holophrases"), then, two words linked together, in order to express a limited set of basic relations. Word order was important, but there was no use of morphological markers.

STAGE 2: Modulations of meaning within the simple sentence.

The major feature of this stage was that the first elements of morphology began to appear, - the meaning of the basic "content words" began to be modulated through the addition of morphological markers.

STAGE 3: Modalities of the simple sentence.

The children began to acquire the linguistic means of modifying meaning through interrogatives, negatives and imperatives.

STAGE 4: Embedding of one sentence within another

STAGE 5: Coordination of simple sentences and propositional relations.

The two final stages were those in which they began to acquire, respectively, the ability to embed sentences and to conjoin sentences.

Each of the three children passed through these stages in the same order, though at different rates. Each stage was named for the appearance of

the particular feature mentioned, not the full mastery of it. As Brown says:

> A stage is named ... either for a process that is the major new development occurring in that interval, or, for an exceptionally elaborate development of a process at that stage. However, the whole development of any one of the major constructional processes is not contained within a given stage interval. Semantic roles go on developing after Stage I; the modulations of meaning extend from Stage II to beyond even Stage V. The germs of the major modalities of simple sentences (interrogation, negation, the imperative) are to be found even in Stage I in a syntactically rudimentary form, and there are combinations of the modalities, like the tag question, which do not appear until after Stage V. (p.59)

This establishing of stages through which all children passed in the acquisition of English was one of Brown's most important contributions. However, in a closer analysis of Stage II, he made another very significant discovery: he found that there was an approximately invariant order in which the three children acquired a set of fourteen morphemes in English, though once again rates were different. The mean order of acquisition, with rough indications of the stages at which the morphemes were acquired, is set out in Table 1.

To appreciate the nature of these findings it may help to focus attention on those elements of the above list which refer to verbs. If we select from Brown's list of morphemes only those which are associated with the verbal system, and map them onto part of the English verbal system, we get the pattern of acquisition set out in Table 2 (the order is indicated by the subscript numbers).

TABLE 1 Mean order of acquisition of 14 morphemes across three children, relative to Stages I-V of language development

		ACQUIRED BY:
1:	Present progressive (*-ing*)	STAGE 2
2.5:	*in*	"
2.5:	*on*	"
4:	Plural (*-s*)	STAGE 3
5:	Past irregular (e.g. *went, brought*)	"
6:	Possessive (*-'s*)	"
7:	Uncontractible copula (*is*)	"
8:	Articles (*the, a*)	STAGE 4
9:	Past regular (*-t, -d, -ed*)	"
		after STAGE 5
10:	Third person regular (*-s*)	
11:	Third person irregular (e.g. *has, is*)	"
12:	Uncontractible auxiliary (e.g. *is, am*)	"
13:	Contractible copula (*-'s, -'m*)	"
14:	Contractible auxiliary (*-'s, -'m*)	"

(Based on Brown, p.274, Table 38, and p.271, Fig.14)

TABLE 2 Order of acquisition of the morphological elements of the English verbal system as evidenced by Brown's 1973 subjects

I bake	I *am* baking$_1$	I baked$_4$
You bake	You *are* baking	You baked
She bakes$_3$	He *is* baking	He baked
We bake	We *are* baking	We baked
You bake	You *are* baking	You baked
They bake	They *are* baking	They baked
I go	I *am going*	I *went*$_2$
You go	You *are going*	You *went*
She goes	She *is going*	He *went*
etc.		
I *am*$_2$	I'm$_5$ (baking)	
You *are*	You're	
He *is*	He's	
etc.	etc.	
I'm$_5$		
You're		
He's		
etc.		
I *have*		
You *have*		
She *has*$_6$		
etc.		

(Subscript numbers indicate order of acquisition)

In a cross-sectional study of 24 children de Villiers and de Villiers (1973) corroborated Brown's findings concerning the order of acquisition of the fourteen morphemes. This particular aspect of Brown's research was to have a great influence on second language acquisition research.[1]

There is, therefore, a clear progression in the acquisition of English as a first language, both at a macro-level (stages) and at a micro-level (morphology).

We may summarise the linguistic development of the child with a diagram based on Garman (1979, p.201) who charts in detail the various elements of this progression. The child seems to move along the following type of continuum in its acquisition of English:[2]

> 1 *babbling* => 2 *single word utterances* => 3 *word successions* => 4 *two word combinations* => 5 *two-/three-word utterances with elements of morphology* => 6 *simple phrases* => 7 *complex phrases* => *etc.*,

all leading, presumably, to the ability to converse.

1.1.2 Second or foreign language

In second language research so called "natural orders of acquisition" and "developmental sequences" have been established for different areas of various languages. The difference between "natural orders of acquisition" and "developmental sequences" is broadly as follows: the former refer to the orders in which learners come to be able to use accurately and consistently certain elements of the language (incidentally, researchers in this area have generally concentrated on elements of mor-

phology); "developmental sequences", on the other hand, chart the various steps or stages through which the learner passes on his/her way to the fully accurate use of certain aspects of the language (e.g. negative, interrogative etc.) These developmental sequences will, of course, include many "inaccurate" forms.

1.1.2.1 Natural orders of acquisition

The seminal work in the area of natural orders of L2 acquisition has been that of Dulay and Burt, who discovered in a series of cross-sectional studies of Spanish- and Cantonese-speaking children learning English in the US that they acquired a set of 13 morphemes in English in an invariant order (Dulay and Burt 1973, 1974a, 1974b, 1974c, 1975). Due to a certain amount of criticism of their manner of presenting their findings, Dulay and Burt finally expressed their results in an "acquisition hierarchy" rather than in rank order; see Table 3.

Dulay and Burt's order was not the same as that found by Brown for first language, but it was consistent for children of different language backgrounds. Their findings were replicated by others, e.g. Fathman (1975). Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974) found for seventy-three adults from 12 different language backgrounds learning English in the US that the order in which they acquired the set of 13 morphemes was very similar to that found by Dulay and Burt for children. Similar orders of acquisition[3] were found for other adults of different language backgrounds (see Krashen et al. 1976, Krashen et al. 1977).

TABLE 3 **Acquisition hierarchy for 13 English grammatical morphemes for Spanish-speaking and Cantonese-speaking children**

	GROUP 1
PRONOUN CASE (nominative/ accusative)	WORD ORDER (in simple declarative S)
	GROUP 2
SINGULAR COPULA *('s/is)*	SINGULAR AUXILIARY *('s/is)*
PLURAL AUXILIARY *(are)*	PROGRESSIVE *(-ing)*
	GROUP 3
PAST IRREGULAR	CONDITIONAL AUXILIARY *(would)*
POSSESSIVE *('s)*	LONG PLURAL *(-es)*
3rd PERSON SINGULAR *(-s)*	
	GROUP 4
PERFECT AUXILIARY *(have)*	PAST PARTICIPLE *(-en)*

(From Dulay and Burt 1975, reproduced in Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, p.208.)

1.1.2.2 Developmental sequences

Developmental sequences have been established for the acquisition of many areas of different languages; for example, for the negative in English (Cancino et al. 1974); for the negative in English and German (Wode 1976, 1981); for the interrogative in English (Cancino et al. 1974, Ravem 1974); for word order in German (Meisel et al. 1981); for the verbal system in German (Dittmar 1981, Meisel 1983); for the verbal system in French (Devitt 1984); for complex sentences in English (Schachter and Hart 1978).[4] As an example, Table 4 reproduces Wode's 1981 detailing of the developmental sequence for negation in English as acquired by his German-speaking children.

This type of research has examined the formal aspects of language, concentrating particularly, if not exclusively, on the micro-level. Unfortunately, researchers do not seem to have been able to establish widely acceptable stages of overall language development, i.e. development at the macro-level (though see Larsen-Freeman 1978, and Clahsen 1983 for attempts in this direction). However, the findings of the research in second language acquisition would seem to indicate that the learner acquires a second language in a definite order, perhaps according to a schema not unlike that given above for first language acquisition[5], i.e.

> *1 single words => 2 word combinations => 3 morphological elements acquired in a set order => 4 word-order rules acquired in a set order => 5 complex sentences acquired in a set order => etc.*

Many might be (and have been) tempted to suggest that the teaching sequence should match the findings of researchers about the acquisition

TABLE 4 L2 development sequence for negation. Roman and Arabic numerals indicate successive stages of development. Items in brackets ( ) are optional.

Stage structural types:

I anaphoric negative *no:*
no, du mogelat, ja
X, *no*

II external non-anaphoric negative:
1: *no* + adjective
no + verb
no + noun or NP
2: *no* + verb or VP

III internal *be*-negation
X + *(be) no* + Y
X + *(be) not* + Y

IV internal full verb negation
and imperative *don't*
post-verbal *no/not:*
subject + verb + *no/not* + X
subject + verb + pronoun + *not* (+ X)
subject + verb + *not/no* + N
pre-verbal *no/not:*
subject + *no/not* + VP
post-auxiliary *no/not*
subject + *can no/not/n't* + VP
post-verbal imperative *not*
verb (+ pronoun) + *not* (+ X)
imperative *don't*
don't + VP

V suppletive *don't, didn't*
sentence internal *don't, didn't*
pre-nominal *nothing*
negative *any*

(From Wode 1981, page 104, Table 4)

sequence. In fact, in some ways teachers already seem to be following natural acquisition sequences in their courses. Devitt (1984) shows that children learning French in a natural environment acquired the verbal system in the following order: *Présent, Passé Composé, Futur, Imparfait,* matching traditional teaching orders almost 100%. However, apart from the fact that such an approach would involve teachers accepting "errors" as developmental, which many would find very difficult, there is a fundamental error in such a suggestion: it takes no account of the context in which the language was acquired by the subjects of the research reported.

Let us turn now to a study of this context.

1.2 The context of language acquisition

1.2.1 First language

Research into the contexts of language acquisition has begun to throw new light on the language learning process. The following simple example of language in use will serve as an illustration.

Child:	*Mammy! Mammy!*
Mother:	*Yes, dear, what is it?*
Child:	*Liga!*
Mother:	*Oh, you poor darling. Your shoe has fallen into the Liga.*

Here we have a child who is obviously incapable of putting two words together, literally. He is not yet even at the stage of two-word utterances but is still at Brown's Stage I. Yet this child is able to carry on a meaningful conversation with his mother. He knows how to get her attention: "Mammy!" Having got it, he goes on to respond to

her request for a topic for comment ("Yes, dear, what is it?") by replying: "Liga". The mother makes the relevant comment as expected. The conversation is very clearly structured, even though the child's input is single words. This structure can be illustrated as follows:

- NOMINATION
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
  ELICITATION OF TOPIC FOR COMMENT
- NOMINATION OF TOPIC
- COMMENT ON THE TOPIC

The child has acquired this vertical structure of conversation, - how conversation is organized, - even though it does not yet have the horizontal structure of individual utterances - how words are strung together correctly and meaningfully[6].

If one looks at the mother's utterances, one notices that she is actually providing her child with a model of the horizontal organization of conversation. The child is receiving from her information about the correct usage of the language, information about its forms and structures. The mother's input will serve for the learning of these forms and structures. One could surmise, for example, the following stages in "horizontal" development:

SHOE LIGA
(two-word utterance with correct order, indicating location)

SHOE IN LIGA
(appearance of prepositions)

MY SHOE IN LIGA
(appearance of possessive)

MY SHOE IS IN LIGA
(uncontractible copula)

MY SHOE IS IN THE LIGA
(definite article)

Of course, by this stage the child would have progressed to doing other things with his Liga!

This "horizontal" development obviously reflects the kind of progression uncovered by the first language acquisition research referred to above. However, Scollon (1974), as quoted by Hatch (1978a), points out that it takes place within a framework of cooperative communication:

> This suggests that ... discourse structure is at the heart of sentence structure from the beginning of its development.

Therefore, the model of development of linguistic ability is not really

> *babbling => single words => two word utterances etc. => conversation.*

Rather, the knowledge of the structure of conversation acts as the scaffolding (vertical structure) which enables the child to acquire the horizontal structure (*single words => two-word utterances etc.*) What Brown and others have been charting is the development of this horizontal structure. The vertical structure was already firmly in place. A child, therefore, learns to *converse* long before it learns to *talk*.

A second (this time genuine) example of a child's conversation, taken from Snow (1978), will add a new dimension to our discussion. In this instance an experimenter (E) is talking to an 18-month-old child (C) before the child's mother (M) walks in. The child is trying unsuccessfully to initiate a conversation with the researcher, and only when the mother enters does the conversation actually develop:

C: *Bandaid.*
E: *Where's your bandaid?*

C: *Bandaid.*
E: *Do you have a bandaid?*

C: *Bandaid.*
E: *Did you fall down and hurt yourself?*

(Mother enters)

C: *Bandaid.*
M: *Who gave you the bandaid?*
C: *Nurse.*
M: *Where did she put it?*
C: *Arm.*

According to Snow, the reason the conversation succeeds only when the mother comes in is twofold: (i) there is the shared experience, - the visit of the mother and child to the hospital that morning; (ii) the mother is finely tuned to the type of question the child is capable of replying to. The researcher had not shared the experience with the child. They did not, therefore, have a common starting point, and she did not know the questions to ask to trigger off the conversation. The crucial new element is shared experience, - shared knowledge of the world. So crucial, indeed, is this

shared knowledge of the world that conversation cannot normally take place without it.

We normally accept that participants in a conversation need to have some linguistic knowledge in order for communication to succeed. We are perhaps less conscious that they need two other types of knowledge: (i) knowledge of the world and (ii) knowledge of discourse conventions, or knowledge of how conversation works. Yet, in the examples given above, the children (who were learning their first language) were able to carry on a very successful conversation, even though they had only the latter two types of knowledge. The fact that they did not have the first type - knowledge of the appropriate linguistic forms and structures - did not affect the outcome of their conversations.[7]

What this type of research seems to be pointing to is that the first two types of knowledge are not only necessary for communication but are essential prerequisites for language development to occur at all. They act as the vertical scaffolding which supports the acquisition of the horizontal structure, the formal aspects of the language.

1.3.2 The contexts of second language acquisition

Let us now look at the learner who comes in contact with a foreign language for the first time. He certainly does not have a knowledge of the linguistic structures or forms of the foreign language. He is quite likely, however, to have the other two types of knowledge - knowledge of how conversation works and knowledge of the world which he can share with the native speaker of his target language. Even as a beginner, therefore, the learner of a foreign language has quite a lot of usable knowledge. With a sympathetic native

speaker it should be possible to exploit this knowledge. The conditions for communication are in many respects not unlike those that obtained for the child in the conversations cited above. The severe limitations in linguistic knowledge should not necessarily be an insurmountable barrier to communication.

The situation is, unfortunately, not quite so simple. In the case of the child there *is* a shared knowledge of the world, but it is very limited; it is, therefore, possible for adult and child to bring the specific framework "into the workspace" of conversation without too much difficulty. There are limitations on the possible conversations, caused by the limitations in the child's cognitive maturity and in his/her experience of the world. Conversations are also very largely restricted to the here-and-now. As a result, there are limitations both in the range of topics (and, therefore, in the range of vocabulary used) and in the speech acts performed. The adult speaking to the child has a very limited range of things that can be said about a particular topic. The conversation is, therefore, fairly predictable. This predictability facilitates the task of the child at two levels: (a) participating meaningfully in the conversation and (b) learning the forms of the language. The same will obviously hold for a child learning a second language.[8]

The adult[9] second language learner, on the other hand, who tries to carry on a conversation with an adult native speaker, will have a much wider range of topics that he or she will want to speak about because of a much greater experience of the world, and, accordingly, will have to use a much wider range of vocabulary. Adult-adult conversations are likely, therefore, to be much less predictable than adult-child conversations. It is obvious that one of the greatest sources of diffi-

culty for the adult foreign language learner talking with a native speaker is likely to be vocabulary, and this simply in order to establish the topic of conversation. Hatch (1978a) sums up the differences between the situation of the child and that of the adult learning a language:

> The problem, then, for the adult learner is that the discourse of Adult-Adult conversation relies much less on immediate environment than Adult-Child or Child-Child interactions. Topic identification is much more difficult. The adult learner must, *at the very least*, recognize the content vocabulary of a topic nomination in order to participate in conversation at all. Without vocabulary cues, he cannot make any of the *predictions* necessary for topic-relevant responses. (p.424; my italics)

In conversations with children the range of topics and what is said about them is limited by the child's experience and cognitive development. The child learns first to converse within this limited range. Conversations are, therefore, predictable. This predictability provides the child with conditions that favour his learning how to talk.

In the case of the adult, the range of possible topics and what can be said about them is not limited in this way; there is much less predictability. Because of this unpredictability, which is inherent in natural conversations between adults, the adult learner of a foreign language is faced with serious difficulties in understanding and in being understood, especially at the earlier stages of learning, and the potential for breakdown in communication is very great. Both parties to the conversation have often to do a lot of work merely to establish the topic for discussion (see Hatch 1978a, p.431) and there must be constant checking for

comprehension. Many topics will simply be avoided because of the linguistic limitations of the learner (see, for example, Faerch and Kasper 1983, Tarone 1980, Tarone et al. 1983). This is quite likely to cause a certain amount of frustration in the adult learner who finds himself in a position of apparent cognitive inferiority vis-a-vis the native speaker, simply because of his lack of knowledge of the language.[10] Accordingly, the supporting frameworks of shared knowledge are more difficult to establish. If the adult learner wishes to have such a supportive framework in conversations, then either he has to pay the price of a severe restriction in topics and in speech acts and limit himself to predictable situations, or else he has to spend a lot of time and energy trying to establish a framework of shared knowledge; the result in both cases is likely to be frustration.

Is there any way in which the necessary supportive framework can be made available to the adult language learner without these restrictions and frustrations? The answer may lie in providing him with authentic texts from the media.

2 AUTHENTIC TEXTS

2.1 Understanding texts

We have traditionally divided language skills into four categories, – listening, speaking, reading and writing. These reflect the different types of observable behaviour associated with language. Our examinations, even recent ones, are based to a large extent on this categorising of the language skills. Furthermore, it is still the case that many teachers and learners are influenced by the hierarchy established by the structuralist/behaviourist approach to language learning: nothing must be said which has not been heard, nothing read which has not been said, nothing written which has not been read. The result is that the learner often has to wait until late in the language learning process before being given access to authentic texts. Until then the reading material that is provided is usually either meaningless and/or irrelevant, or else it lacks natural discourse structure.

The four-cornered division we normally make, in terms of (a) medium of communication, and (b) receptive versus productive skills, gives the following schema:

	RECEPTIVE	PRODUCTIVE
ORAL MEDIUM	Listen	Speak
WRITTEN MEDIUM	Read	Write

There are, however, other ways of looking at these skills, as Widdowson (1978) points out. He suggests applying different criteria: rather than make the distinction between receptive and productive, he suggests distinguishing between reciprocal and non-reciprocal activities.

ORAL MEDIUM	Listen *reciprocal*	Speak
	Listen *non-reciprocal*	Speak
WRITTEN MEDIUM	Read *reciprocal*	Write
	Read *non-reciprocal*	Write

Reciprocal activities are those that are shared between at least two people who alternate the roles of listener/speaker or reader/writer. The activities are reciprocal in the sense that what each one says or writes will influence what the other will respond. Both parties share responsibility for the construction of the communication and for the direction(s) it will take. They are, therefore, participating in the ongoing process of creating a dialogue, either oral or written. Thus, the dialogues between mother and child noted above are reciprocal in the oral medium; an exchange of letters would be reciprocal in the written medium. Such reciprocal activities between adults are, as we have

said above, normally quite unpredictable in their outcome.

Non-reciprocal activities, on the other hand, are those in which one party makes no contribution to the text produced by the other. The text (oral or written) exists independently of the listener/reader and cannot be influenced by him in any way. This is the case with radio broadcasts, lectures, sermons etc. for the oral medium, and with newspaper articles, novels, notices etc. for the written medium.

Non-reciprocal discourse does, however, involve the listener/reader in an interaction in the sense that he engages in an internal dialogue with the speaker/writer. The speaker/writer knows that it is not sufficient simply to speak or to write; he must speak for a listener or write for a reader. Furthermore, the listener/reader is free to continue with the internal dialogue or to abandon it at any time as he sees fit. If he continues with it he does so on his own (listener's/reader's) terms. The speaker/writer must, therefore, like the participant in a reciprocal dialogue, create a space to be shared by his listener/reader so as to allow the dialogue to take place. He must speak or write with the listener/reader's reactions and responses in mind. As Widdowson (1984) explains it:

> I want to suggest that written discourse too represents an interactive process of negotiation. But whereas in spoken discourse this process is typically overt and reciprocal, in written discourse it is covert and non-reciprocal. Thus in a spoken exchange the participants alternate in open negotiation of meanings, as we have seen, each taking turns to contribute to the interaction. The writer, however, is solitary; the person to whom he wishes to transfer information is absent and often, to

some degree, unknown. This means that the writer has to conduct his interaction by enacting the roles of both participants. Since there is no possibility of immediate reaction he has to anticipate what it is likely to be and provide for any possible misunderstanding and unclarity arising from a lack of shared knowledge. The writer, then, has a basic conveyancing problem: he has certain information to impart for some illocutionary or perlocutionary purpose - to inform, to impress, to direct action, and so on, but he has to prepare the ground and set up conditions favourable to the reception of such information. He does this by continually shifting his function from initiator to recipient, from 'speaker', as it were, to 'hearer', enacting the interaction by playing the role of each participant ....

... The result of this discourse, this covert non-reciprocal interaction, is a text: words on a page. (pp.59-61)

For this interaction to take place, the two parties must share the following types of knowledge: (i) knowledge of the world, including some knowledge of the topic in question (where this might be lacking or deficient the speaker/writer must provide it); (ii) knowledge of the way this particular type of discourse operates; and (iii) knowledge of the forms and structures of the language. In other words, exactly the same kinds of conditions apply here as for reciprocal discourse (e.g. conversation). Of its very nature, however, non-reciprocal discourse is much more structured than reciprocal discourse, even if it is not always predictable (as, for example, in the case of literature; see Widdowson 1984 for a discussion of poetry in this context.)

It is this underlying structure of text that can provide the adult language learner (even the beginner) with the essential frameworks for participating in non-reciprocal discourse, both written and spoken, in the target language. Through this participation he also learns the forms of the language. As far as the language learner is concerned, this is one of the crucial differences between non-reciprocal and reciprocal discourse. Precisely because the structures of texts are set, they are accessible, even if the process of accessing them is complex. We will now examine this process in a little more detail.

2.2 Understanding texts in a foreign language

Let us suppose that the language learner comes in contact with a text in a foreign language about a topic with which he is totally familiar. (He may initially recognise such texts by familiar words, names, photographs, diagrams, etc.) By bringing to the task of deciphering this text (a) his relevant knowledge of the world and of the topic, and (b) his knowledge of how the discourse type in question operates, the necessary frameworks are set up, access to the text is made possible, and communication can be established with the speaker/writer. The language now poses much less of a problem, since the learner can interpret unfamiliar words and structures in the light of his knowledge of the topic.

It is, therefore, possible to make the same kind of comment about the language learner coming in contact with oral or written texts about familiar topics in the foreign language as we made above for the *first* language learner taking part in conversations: the adult learner can participate in the discourse with very little knowledge of the lan-

guage, because the other two types of knowledge are there; in other words, the least important knowledge needed for coping with text may be the knowledge of the language itself.

Furthermore, as in the case of the child, the language will be learned more effectively and meaningfully through texts on familiar topics because of the much higher level of predictability they contain, that is, because the scaffoldings of (i) shared experience/knowledge of the topic, and (ii) the structure of the discourse, are already in place. Equally important is the fact that the learner's participation in the discourse will be meaningful, and therefore the frustration which is so frequently a feature of face-to-face discourse because of the severe limitation of possible topics will be avoided.

An example will help to illustrate the point. Below is a text from a Danish paper, *Berlingske Sondag*, of December 1983, in which a small number of changes have been made. If you have no knowledge of Danish, you may find it interesting to see what you can make of it.

2500 MAND JAGER TERRORISTERNE

Over 2500 soldater og politifolk
fortsatte igår en gigantistk klapjagt på
fire terrorister, der slap bort, da
sikkerhedsstyrkerne fredag aften
befriede direktor Hans Johannson og
pågreb to af hans bortførere.

Under befrielsesaktionen blev en
politikadet og en soldat draebt af
terroristerne, mens en kriminalbetjent
blev såret. Igår blev en tilsyneladende

sagesløs mand skudt i hovedet af politiet, da han forsøgte at køre udenom en vejspaerring.

... Kidnapperne, der kraevede to millioner pund eller naesten 30 millioner kroner i løsepenge, menes at vaere de samme som i sin tid bortførte vaeddeløbshesten Elan, der aldrig er blevet fundet.

Befrielsesaktionen blev ivaerksat, efter at politiet havde modtaget et tip fra en kontakt indenfor BMH. Omkring 1000 politifolk og soldater med panserkøretøjer omringede en skovstraekning ved Kiel i Schleswig-Holstein grevskabet naer graensen til Danmark. Der blev oprettet 50 vejspaerringer og hvert eneste hus blev minutiøst undersøgt.

Terroristerne forsøgte at flygte og skjule sig med deres offer i en hule som de havde forberedt i skoven, men de blev opdaget og åbnede ild imod politiet. De kastede en håndgranat der draebte en soldat og en politikadet.

A little reflection on how you coped with this text may allow you to observe some of the processes that operate when learners come in contact with texts in a foreign language. In the first instance you may have picked out a few familiar-looking words, such as *terroristerne, politifolk, kidnapperne*. Your knowledge of the world may have suggested a general outline of what happened; you will also have had certain expectations because you knew that it was a newspaper text.

Beyond that, however, unless you know some Danish or a related language, you are likely to have made little sense of the article.

The only changes made in the above text were: (i) proper names were changed; (ii) one sentence was omitted. The original text follows; if you are unfamiliar with the details of the incident reported, a brief summary appears in the footnotes.[11]

2500 MAND JAGER IRA-GRUPPE

Over 2500 irske soldater og politifolk fortsatte igår en gigantistk klapjagt på fire IRA-terrorister, der slap bort, da sikkerhedsstyrkerne fredag aften befriede supermarkeds-direktor Don Tidey og pågreb to af hans bortførere.

Under befrielsesaktionen blev en politikadet og en soldat draebt af terroristerne, mens en kriminalbetjent blev såret. Igår blev en tilsyneladende sagesløs mand skudt i hovedet af politiet, da han forsøgte at køre udenom en vejspaerring.

Den britiske premierminister Margaret Thatcher lykønskede lørdag sin irske kollega, Garret Fitzgerald med befrielsen af Tidey, der for 24 dage siden blev bortført af IRA-terrorister, forklaedt som politifolk. Kidnapperne, der kraevede to millioner pund eller naesten 30 millioner kroner i løsepenge, menes at vaere de samme som i sin tid bortførte vaeddeløbshesten Shergar, der aldrig er blevet fundet.

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Befrielsesaktionen blev ivaerksat, efter at politiet havde modtaget et tip fra en kontakt indenfor IRA. Omkring 1,000 politifolk og soldater med panserkøretøjer omringede en skovstraekning ved Ballinamore i Leitrim - grevskabet naer graensen til Ulster. Der blev oprettet 50 vejspaerringer og hvert eneste hus blev minutiost undersøgt.

Terroristerne forsøgte at flygte og skjule sig med deres offer i en hule som de havde forberedt i skoven, men de blev opdaget og åbnede ild imod politiet. De kastede en håndgranat der draebte en soldat og en politikadet.

If you were familiar with the events in question, even a casual glance through this latter (original) version of the newspaper report is likely to have given you the general sense. For this version presented you with named people and familiar events, which enabled you to construct a much more detailed framework within which to decipher many more of the words in the text.

It is important to remember, however, that it was the Danish text itself which evoked this framework. The framework of knowledge and the text itself were used cyclically to illuminate one another mutually. For example, on reading the second version you may have reinterpreted *politifolk* from "politicians" to "policemen" as a result of your prior knowledge of the incident. This new knowledge of elements of the language would in turn have enabled you to recall elements of the incident which you might have forgotten, or to check

the accuracy of the information as given in the article. In technical terms what you were doing was combining "top-down processing" (using prior knowledge of the event) with "bottom-up processing" (decoding the elements of the text).

Interestingly, this matches exactly what happens in the reading process in one's native langunge. Most recent research on reading in a first language stresses the importance of the information which the reader himself brings to the reading task. Carrell (1983b), for example, writes:

> A fundamental assumption of the schema-theoretic view of language comprehension is that the process of comprehending a text is an interactive one between the listener or reader's background knowledge of content and structure, and the text itself. The text alone does not carry meaning. Rather, a text only provides guidance for listeners or readers as to how they should construct the intended meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge. Since comprehension involves not only the information in the text, but also knowledge the listener or reader already possesses, efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge (Adams and Collins 1979). Comprehending words, sentences, and discourse, then involves much more than just relying on one's own linguistic competence. In fact, one's linguistic competence is just one part of one's total background knowledge. (pp.82-83)

It is important to note that researchers differ somewhat in the importance they assign to the decoding process on the one hand and to prior knowledge on the other. However, even researchers who stress the decoding aspect of reading (word-

by-word, or even letter-by-letter, processing: the "bottom-up approach"), have to make provision for the important role played by the reader's prior knowledge or schemata. Samuels and Kamil (1984), for example, found that the crucial difference between beginner readers or poor readers on the one hand, and skilled readers on the other, was the ability of the latter to take context into consideration in processing. In a research project involving children in primary school in the US, they found that poor readers in second grade who were presented with words in isolation and then with words in context, used letter-by-letter processing in both cases; good readers in both second and fourth grades used holistic processing for both cases. However,

> the most interesting results were with our fourth-grade poor readers. They did letter-by-letter processing for words in isolation but holistic processing for words in context. We, therefore, find an important interaction between an inside-the-head factor, that is, reader skill, and an outside-the-head factor, that is, context. Thus, an inside-the-head factor and an outside-the-head factor can interact to increase the size of the perceptual unit used in word recognition. (Samuels and Kamil 1984, p.203)

They posit a feedback loop among the components of their model, notably from the semantic memory to the other components. They sum up their findings:

> Thus contrary to conventional wisdom, which states that comprehension is the process of getting meaning from a page, comprehension is viewed here as the process of bringing meaning to a text. It is this process of bringing meaning to a text which accounts for the fact that

the same text can be interpreted so differently by so many people. (*ibid.*, p.206)

It is essentially a question of emphasis among researchers as to the precise importance of the different elements, but we have seen in the case of your reading of the Danish text that there was a continuous feedback loop or cyclical process which served to bring meaning to the text. The claim, then, that reading in a foreign language cannot be like reading in a first language, as suggested by Carrell 1983a and Clarke 1979, is obviously ill-founded. Reading in a foreign language does not have to be as depressing and discouraging as Samuels and Kamil (1984) describe it:

> This alternative switching of attention from decoding to comprehension is similar to the strategy used by beginning students of a foreign language who first work their way through a novel written in a foreign language by translating all the difficult words and then rereading the text again in order to understand it. In beginning reading, the strategy of attention switching allows the student to comprehend, but it comes at a cost. Attention switching is time consuming, puts a heavy demand on short-term memory, and tends to interfere with recall. (pp.197-8)

If the comprehension is facilitated by adequate prior knowledge, the cost of the switching between decoding and comprehension need not be great.

In the case of your reading of the Danish text there was a further important aspect: you will also have come to some initial understanding of how the Danish language operates. Thus, not only were you able to make a certain amount of sense from the article when it was presented in its original form,

but you may also have learned quite an amount of Danish; this was not just vocabulary for content and action words; there were also conjunctions - *og*, prepositions - *over*, etc.; it also included morphology and syntax; for example, the fact that the definite article is tagged on to the end of the noun, (*terroristerne*), the past tense of verbs (*draebte*) and even the formation of the passive voice (*blev draebt*, "were killed"). Much of this knowledge is likely to remain passive, but it is there to provide input for the learning of the formal aspects of Danish as time goes on. The process is not unlike that described above for the acquisition of a first language by children.

2.3 Creating frameworks

It is not, however, always useful or interesting to use texts about subjects with which learners are familiar. What of topics about which the learner knows nothing in advance? In such cases we obviously cannot speak of a prior framework of knowledge.

Or can we? After all, the learner has a general knowledge of the world. Starting from this, a framework of knowledge about a specific topic can be created. This is the essential difference between texts about familiar and unfamiliar topics: in the first case the frameworks already exist, or can easily be "brought into the workspace"; in the second case special materials must be designed to help the learner create for himself the necessary framework. Breen et al. (1979) call such materials "process materials" (in contrast to "content materials", which are the texts themselves).

> ... process materials, on the other hand, will serve as guidelines or frameworks for the learner's use of communicative knowledge and abilities. Their main role will be to initially organize and facilitate the learner's process competence in relation to any particular content. In contrast to content materials, these process materials are very likely to require careful design by teachers and materials writers, and they may be specifically designed to be paired with or complementary to some content materials.

A practical working out of materials of this type with a commentary is given here for a set of Italian texts to be used by beginners with absolutely no knowledge of the language. The texts in question are four newspaper articles and one radio broadcast (the transcript only is given here) dealing with an incident which happened in Rome in March 1984, with which people outside Italy would not be familiar. The commentary will attempt to relate the activities and exercises to the process of (a) participating in the discourse and (b) learning the language. The materials were designed for classroom use. The reader may, however, wish to try them out for himself or herself. Ideally the activities should be done by at least two people (both beginners in Italian). Activities 1 and 2 should be done without reference to the original texts which follow.

(The elements of the first activity owe their origins to the following: Monique Boekaerts (1979) for part 1; in her book *Towards a theory of learning based on individual differences*, she suggests a "clustering" exercise in order to get insights into the learner's cognitive structure. Part 3 stems from an idea developed by Hans-Eberhard Piepho in the series *Story's Way*.)

ACTIVITY 1

Part 1

Below is a jumble of words. They could be clustered together in different ways. How would *you* cluster them? It could make the task easier and more interesting if you were to write each word onto a separate card or slip of paper (e.g. "Postits") and arrange the cards or slips of paper into clusters. Some words you may immediately recognize; others you feel you can guess at. Sort these out first before going to a dictionary for the remainder.

UNA BORSA IL CUSTODE L'ASSASSINO

IL BIDELLO LA SALA DEI PROFESSORI

LA STRAGE LA POLIZIA I RAGAZZI

IL FOLLE LA PROFESSORESSA

LA SCUOLA I VIGILI DEL FUOCO

I GENITORI IL TERRORE IL FUCILE

LA VICEPRESIDE IL SECONDO PIANO

LA CLASSE IL SINDACO DI ROMA

I TIRATORI SCELTI GLI INSEGNANTI

GLI OSTAGGI LA PORTA

GLI AGENTI IN BORGHESE LA SCALA

LE FORZE DELL' ORDINE LA MORTE

Part 2

Below is a list of verbs. Some of them might be associated with the clusters you have made above; others could be "neutral", that is, you could use them with words from any of the clusters. Try sorting them into the clusters, but this time you may need to have a "neutral" cluster or "dustbin".

BLOCCARE LASCIARE VIA SPARARE

INCONTRARE SALIRE PRENDERE IN OSTAGGIO

ANDARE DI FRONTE A.... UCCIDERE TIRARE

PRECIPITARSI ARRENDERSI ENTRARE

Part 3

Now, with the nouns and verbs in the different clusters, try to create your own scenario and story in Italian for what might have happened.

COMMENTARY ON ACTIVITY 1

In the first part of the above activity, you will have used your general knowledge of the world and your linguistic knowledge to create clusters. You are likely to have had at least two major categories: "police" and "school". You may have divided the former into the "goodies" and the "baddies", and the latter into "staff" and "students"; you may have had a smaller cluster for families. Alternatively, you may have had a totally different principle of classification. Classifying the verbs will have been a little more difficult. How-

ever, in the third part, where you were creating your own story, you will have established in your own mind to which cluster each word should belong. Your story is likely to have matched events in the real world involving assassins, hostages and schools.

You will probably have experienced difficulty at two levels in the creation of the story: (i) your vocabulary is too limited to express everything you wanted to say; (ii) your ignorance of the language prevented you from putting the words together as they should go. You may have created such a sentence as: *Assassino entrare scuola* (an expression actually produced on numerous occasions when these texts were being used both by adults and children). In a classroom context such sentences would be expanded by the teacher to something like: *Ah, un assassino è entrato in una scuola. Ma dove? Quale scuola?* The teacher's correction/ expansion provides the appropriate linguistic information at precisely the point where it is needed. Even if this correction is not provided, as in your case as a reader, there is at least an awareness of one's linguistic limitations and of the areas where one needs further information.

There is one further important point to be made. This exercise is actually engaging your creative powers. You have manipulated a few elements of the foreign language in order to create a new text. You have taken the first, and perhaps the most important, step in the creation of a text: invention. As you move through the exercises that follow, it will be suggested from time to time that you come back to your own text to edit it at different levels. It is important, however, to be aware that your text now exists. It will grow organically as you do the various exercises and activities. It should end up as quite a respectable text in its

own right. This process of production will, therefore, mirror very closely the process of comprehension of the original Italian texts, which is after all only natural, since production and comprehension are two facets of the same discourse.

ACTIVITY 2

Part 1

There follows a set of simple statements describing a tragic event that actually place in Rome in mid-March 1984. Most of the words used are to be found in Activity 1 above. The statements have, however, been jumbled up. You have to try to put them into some kind of chronological order. (It should be mentioned that there is a gap of some six hours between two sections of the account given here.)

a: *Maurizio Nobile ha dato il fucile a Ugo Vetere.*

b: *Maurizio Nobile si è arreso.*

c: *Maurizio Nobile si è precipitato al secondo piano.*

d: *Dopo 6 ore Maurizio Nobile ha lasciato via due ragazzi.*

e: *Ernesto Chiovini era il custode della scuola media Ignazio Silone.*

f: *Maurizio Nobile ha incontrato la professoressa Rebecca e gli alunni della 1B.*

g: *ROMA, 13 marzo, 1984.*

h: *Ernesto Chiovini ha tentato di bloccare Maurizio Nobile.*

i: *Il Sindaco di Roma, Ugo Vetere, ha salito le scale.*

j: *Maurizio Nobile ha percorso a grandi falcate il corridoio.*

k: *Maurizio Nobile ha sparato al custode, Ernesto Chiovini, con un fucile.*

l: *Maurizio Nobile ha preso in ostaggio 19 ragazzi, alunni della 1B.*

m: *La Scuola Media Ignazio Silone si trova nella periferia nord di Roma.*

n: *Maurizio Nobile ha ucciso il custode, Ernesto Chiovini.*

o: *Maurizio Nobile è entrato nella scuola media Ignazio Silone alle 9.45.*

COMMENTARY

Here again the logic of the order we establish for the statements will come from our knowledge of the world and also from the way we know newspaper articles are written. The "correct" order, incidentally, is:

g, m, o/e, h, k, n, c/j, f, l, d, i, b, a.

Part 2: Ongoing production of your own story

When creating your own story (see Part 3 of Activity 1) you were no doubt conscious of your lack of linguistic knowledge (horizontal framework) for the construction of morphologically and syntactically accurate sentences. The simplified version above actually provides much of that linguistic knowledge, but embedded in meaningful language. If you now return to your own story you should be in a position to edit it at sentence level: that is, you can now correct the basic syntax and morphology. You might also feel like adding one or two new elements, - e.g. details of time and place, etc. This editing does not alter the basic composition of your own story, which remains a valid text, even though it is still developing.

ACTIVITY 3

Part 1

The statements above gave us information about the events, but they told us very little about the people involved. Who *are* Maurizio Nobile and Ernesto Chiovini?

Before finding this out, it might be useful to reflect a little on what type of information we would expect to get about them in a newspaper article. When describing people, we usually pick out only those features which seem to us to be relevant. Below is a list (not exhaustive) of the aspects of people which might be mentioned and/or described in a newspaper article. If you were the writer, which features in the list would you mention? Mark them with an X.

FISICO

TESTA
- capelli
- volto
- occhi
- naso
- bocca
- denti
- orecchi

CORPO
- spalle
- pancia
- petto
- bracchi
- mano

GAMBE
- ginocchi
- piedi

VESTITI
- sulla testa
- sul corpo
- sui piedi

VOCE

GRANDEZZA

S
T
A
T
U
R
A

PESO

STORIA PERSONALE
- età
- data di nascità
- luogo di nascità
- nazionalità
- stato civile

GENITORI
- nome/cognome del padre
- nóme/cognome della madre
- professione del padre
- professione della madre

EDUCAZIONE/ FORMAZIONE

PROFESSIONE

CARATTERE

Look now at the extracts from the articles which follow and tick the items which were actually mentioned. Then from the two extracts try to make out a profile for each of them. (Note: not all the information for each protagonist is to be found in the articles provided. Should it be?)

Il Messaggero
di Roma

Mercoledì 14 Marzo 1984

Uno squilibrato è penetrato ieri mattina in una scuola media alla periferia nord di Roma, ha ucciso un custode che tentava di ostacolarlo e, per sei ore, ha tenuto in ostaggio un'intera classe.

Il custode ucciso a bruciapelo

Maurizio Nobile, 32 anni, scapolo, disoccupato e già altre volte preda di crisi psichiche, si è presentato alla scuola «Ignazio Silone» in via Cocco Ortu, nella zona del Nuovo Salario, alle 9,45. Si è diretto verso le scale, ma il custode Ernesto Chiovini, 48 anni, moglie e due figli, ha tentato di bloccarlo. In un attimo la tragedia. Il Nobile ha aperto la grossa borsa che aveva con sé e ha sparato quasi a bruciapelo, con un fucile a pompa.

Terrore nella prima B

Mentre arrivava la vicepreside, il Nobile è salito al terzo piano e ha bloccato i 19 ragazzi della prima B. Li ha tenuti in piedi per ore ed è rimasto accucciato a terra, seminascosto. «In certi momenti urlava, poi ci rassicurava» hanno raccontato i ragazzi. Insegnanti e ragazzi delle altre classi sono stati fatti scendere dalle finestre con le autoscale dei vigili. Con lo squilibrato hanno cominciato a parlamentare il giudice Margherita Gerunda, il sindaco Vetere (che si è offerto due volte in ostaggio), il dott. Cetroli del IV distretto di polizia ed il capitano Bianchini dei carabinieri, che si è spacciato per un avvocato. Poco prima delle 16 Maurizio Nobile si è arreso. Il sindaco gli si è avvicinato e si è fatto consegnare il fucile. Nei servizi, i racconti dei famigliari della vittima, dei ragazzi, dei professori, le tremende sei ore di terrore.

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

Mercoledì 14 marzo 1984

Diciannove bambini prigionieri di uno squilibrato che poi si è arreso consegnando il fucile al sindaco Vetere

Sei ore d'incubo in una scuola di Roma

Folle armato uccide il bidello e tiene in ostaggio una classe

Maurizio Nobile, 32 anni, disoccupato, ha fatto irruzione in un'aula della media «Ignazio Silone» alla periferia della città dopo aver sparato al custode che cercava di fermarlo - Le lunghe trattative, l'appostamento dei tiratori scelti, l'angoscia dei genitori

ROMA - Il custode ammazzato a bruciapelo nell'atrio della scuola, diciannove scolaretti di una prima media in ostaggio dell'assassino armato d'un fucile a pompa e che urlava «tanto non ho più niente da perdere! Faccio una strage!», l'interno dell'edificio trasformato in un fortilizio di tiratori scelti e all'esterno l'assedio della folla che piangeva e inveiva, contenuta a stento da un imponente apparato di polizia, carabinieri e vigili urbani. E' stata la lunga, tragica mattinata che ha gettato nell'angoscia l'intera borgata di Valmelaina, con la gente come impazzita che correva verso la scuola, i negozi richiusi, il sibilo delle sirene delle «Volanti» e il rombo degli elicotteri che sorvolavano la zona.

Il terrore è iniziato alle 9,45 quando il primo colpo del fucile «Franchi» calibro 12 maneggiato da Maurizio Nobile, un disoccupato di 32 anni, rimbombava nei corridoi silenziosi della scuola media «Ignazio Silone», in via Cocco Ortu 81, estrema periferia nord della città. Col petto e una spalla squarciati cadeva a terra Ernesto Chiovini, 48 anni, che aveva tentato di bloccare lo sconosciuto apparso improvvisamente nell'atrio. Passeranno sei ore prima che Maurizio Nobile si decida a consegnare quell'arma nelle mani del sindaco Ugo Vetere e l'incubo si dissolva. Sei ore interminabili per i genitori dei piccoli ostaggi, in attesa davanti alla scuola; di estrema tensione per chi — funzionari di polizia, ufficiali dei carabinieri, magistrato — stava conducendo la delicata trattativa con l'assassino barricatosi sul pianerottolo del primo piano dietro un muro di bambini e bambine. Sei ore in cui è riapparso lo spettro di quel 10 ottobre 1956 quando

A pagina 2
articoli di
Ulderico Munzi
Giulio Nascimbeni
Luciano Visintin

a Terrazzano, provincia di Milano, i due folli fratelli Santato presero in ostaggio 97 alunni di una scuola elementare. Ma ecco, momento per momento, la ricostruzione dei fatti.

L'IRRUZIONE — Ernesto Chiovini, il custode della media «Ignazio Silone», vede entrare dall'ingresso principale della scuola un uomo sulla trentina, alto e magro, stempiato, con incollata alle labbra una sigaretta. L'uomo porta un borsone blu a strisce rosse, di quelli da ginnastica. «Lei dove va? A quest'ora non si può entrare» dice il custode. L'uomo appoggia la borsa a terra, estrae un fucile e — senza badare al custode — si dirige verso la rampa delle scale che porta al primo piano. Chiovini non si impaurisce, gli si getta contro cercando di fermarlo, allora quello si gira, punta il fucile e preme il grilletto. Il custode s'abbatte a terra in un lago di sangue.

Maurizio Nobile (ma la sua identità si saprà soltanto 4 ore dopo) sale di corsa le scale. Intanto l'eco della fucilata sembra risvegliare la scuola. Insegnanti e alunni si affacciano alle porte delle classi, non si rendono ben conto di quel che succede. I primi a capire sono l'insegnante di ginnastica Antonio Farina e il bidello, Giuseppe Marulla, che si trovano al piano terra. Accorrono nell'atrio, s'imbattono nel Chiovini a terra che mormora «Aiutateimi, non mi fate morire».

Farina scorge in alto, sulle scale, la figura dell'uomo armato, gli grida: «Che hai fatto! Vieni giù di lì, ci sono i bambini». Nobile, allora, punta di

Cesare De Simone

Segue a pagina due
in sesta colonna

NOME E COGNOME (Come si chiama?):

ETA' (Quanti anni ha?):

INDIRIZZO (Dove abita?):

PROFESSIONE (Che cosa fa?):

STATO CIVILE (sposato, divorziato, ecc.):

TRATTI FISICI:

CARATTERE:

VESTITI:

NOME E COGNOME (Come si chiama?):

ETA' (Quanti anni ha?):

INDIRIZZO (Dove abita?):

PROFESSIONE (Che cosa fa?):

STATO CIVILE (sposato, divorziato, ecc.):

TRATTI FISICI:

CARATTERE:

VESTITI:

PART 3: More editing of your own text

It is time once again to return to your own story and edit it at the level of composition. You are unlikely to have given much information about

the protagonists in what *you* wrote. You should now be in a position to add in that information, using the texts as model.

COMMENTARY

You will also be doing a certain amount of editing at the level of discourse, since you will have to decide which elements are to be included and the order in which they would naturally occur in a newspaper article. You will undoubtedly be editing at sentence level too, using the additional linguistic information that has become available from the authentic texts.

ACTIVITY 4

From your reading of the articles you should now be able to answer the following questions:

Morte e terrore nella scuola

Che cosa è avvenuto?
Dove?
Quando?
Ci sono stati dei feriti?
Ci sono stati morti?
Quanti?
Chi?

In quale ospedale è stato portato il morto?
Quando si è arreso l'assassino?

ACTIVITY 5

At this stage you should be able to cope with the radio version. Unfortunately, it is not possible to listen to it, but the transcript is given below. Check it for further information about the two main protagonists and for any discrepancies with the printed texts.

Transcript of radio broadcast:

> Le sei ore di angoscia ieri mattina in una scuola media della periferia romana. Un folle armato di fucile ha fatto irruzione, ha cominciato a sparare. Ha ucciso un bidello che tentava di fermarlo. Il nostro inviato: Duccio Guida ricostruisce in questo servizio il tragico avvenimento:
>
> Sono le nove e quarantacinque quando Maurizio Nobile entra nell'Instituto medio-elementare Ignazio Silone. Gli si fa incontro il portiere Ernesto Chiovini di quarantanove anni padre di due figli, inorganico da soli due mesi. E deciso di no farlo entrare. Nobile allora estrae da una grossa borsa un fucile a pompa e gli spara. Il bidello morira qualche ora dopo al policlinico. Inizia così la tragedia che ieri ha sconvolto il quartiere romano di Val Melama. Il folle si barrica dentro una classe - è la prima B, facendo allontanare come ci dice una insegnante, tutte le altre persone.
>
> "Ha parlato, ha passaggiato un po' nervosamente nella stanza poi è uscito, è rientrato, ha sparato in classe e non

ha detto nulla. A noi non ha detto assolutamente niente." - "Lei come ha fatto a uscire?" - "Sono rimasta sola nell'aula, solo con due bambini sulla porta, che da nel corridoio, così sono uscita anche perché lui non aveva interesse a me. A un certo punto ha chiesto che uscissero altri bambini ma non c'era più nessuno. Gli hanno detto che c'ero io, l'insegnante, ma lui non m'ha fatto uscire quindi, cioè non mi voleva come ostaggio." E confuso, non sa cosa dire, rifiuta di trattare con il sostituto procuratore di turno: la dottoressa Margherita Gironda e con il sindaco di Roma: Ugo Vetere. Passa il tempo ma Nobile non cede. Solo verso le quindici e trenta, dopo circa sei ore, si chiude l'estenuante trattativa. Nobile fa uscire i primi bambini; consegna il fucile al sindaco; si arrende. I piccoli studenti escono. Così raccontano ciò che li ha sconvolti:

"Ha detto che non dovevamo avere paura perché non ci faceva niente soltanto se lo costringeva la polizia" - "... sembra che una di queste bambine è state presa ..." - "Sì." - "Come ti chiami tu?" - "Disermini Simona." - "Che cosa è successo in queste lunghe ore?" - "Ci teneva col fucile, ci teneva." - "Vi ha terrorizzati, vi ha messo paura?" - "Sì, insomma ... ("lasciate perdere per piacere") Tutti quanti piangevano dentro." "Vi ha minacciati continuamente?" - "Si, ... se vedeva i poliziotti alla finestre ci metteva il fucile addosso e ci voleva uccidere."

Alle diciassette e due, Nobile viene portato via. La folla, che fino allora aveva avuto un comportamento composto e civile si avvicina minacciosa alle pantere della polizia. Ma solo un attimo di tensione per scacciare ore e ore di angoscia accumulata in un lungo pomeriggio che finora raramente era stato vissuto in una città del nostro paese.

Chi è Maurizio Nobile, trentadue anni; scapolo; secondo di due fratelli. Maurizio viveva fino a ieri assieme ai genitori. Il padre è radiologo presso l'INAIG. La madre è casalinga: "uno che non si vedeva e non si sentiva", così un vicino di casa ha descritto il giovane. Di carattere introverso Maurizio Nobile ha sempre condotto vita riservata. Incensurato, aveva il porto d'armi. Insomma, uno di quei tanti giovani disoccupati ma senza problemi economici. Tempo fa era salito sul tetto del condominio dove abitava. Vi rimase per oltre un'ora senza farne spiegazione. Dai racconti di alcuni conoscienti, pare che i rapporti fra Maurizio e la sua famiglia.

COMMENTARY

The spoken work in a foreign language is always much more difficult to process than the written, perhaps because the text is not available for consultation. However, by this stage you should have all the elements necessary for processing the radio version of the events. You will have (i) the

main elements of the story (content schema), (ii) the framework of the discourse (formal schema, vertical structure), and (iii) the linguistic elements, both vocabulary and structures (horizontal structure). You should, therefore, be in a position to cope with the account of the story as given on the radio, though not in as much detail as for the printed texts. It would be appropriate to focus only on certain facets of the event: you might be asked to listen to the broadcast account and simply note in what ways the information corresponds to, or differs from, what was in the articles. For example, what details does the radio give about the two protagonists? Does it mention those items which you found for the profile which you created of them earlier? Does it add any new elements?

ACTIVITY 6

(The ideas that led to this particular activity came mainly from David Little's work on texts with graduate students in the Centre for Language and Communications Studies, Trinity College, Dublin.)

The passage below has been drastically simplified and as a result is now somewhat distorted. It originally came from *L'Osservatore Romano* of 14 March 1984. What changes would you need to make in order for it to become a coherent paragraph? Try improving on it by rewriting it. You can, of course, refer to the articles which you have already read. Where you do not have enough Italian to actually make the changes, indicate in English what you would suggest as an improvement.

> Maurizio Nobile è giovane. Maurizio Nobile si è presentato alla scuola media Ignazio Silone verso le 9.45. Maurizio Nobile aveva una grossa borsa. Il

custode della scuola si chiamava Ernesto Chiovini. Il custode cercava di fermare Maurizio Nobile. Maurizio Nobile ha risposto. La risposta de Maurizio Nobile era di aprire il fuoco. Maurizio Nobile ha dato due colpi mortali. Il custode è spirato poco dopo. Il custode è spirato nell' ospedale. Avevano trasportato d'urgenza il custode all' ospedale. Il custode aveva 42 anni. Il custode aveva una moglie. Il custode aveva due figli.

Now compare your suggestions for improvements and your own version with the original, which is reproduced below.

Osservatore Romano, 14 March 1984

Secondo le prime ricostruzioni del fatto, il giovane si è presentato alla scuola, con una grossa borsa, verso le 9.45. Al custode, Ernesto Chiovini, che cercava di fermarlo, ha risposto aprendo il fuoco: due colpi mortali. L'uomo è spirato poco dopo, nell'ospedale dove lo avevano trasportato d'urgenza. Aveva 48 anni, moglie e due figli.

COMMENTARY

Your knowledge of how discourse works will probably have caused you to suggest such changes as: "Get rid of the proper names", or "Replace 'Maurizio Nobile' by a pronoun at the end of sentence 5". When you compare your suggestions with the original you will see some of them actually implemented. You should now be in a position to make some of these changes yourself. Other changes

which you actually made can be checked for correctness.

The exercise involved you again in writing, but it forced you to go beyond sentence level and to edit at the level of discourse. You will have been at least partially successful; what you have produced will have improved on (be more coherent than) the above disjointed sentences. You are now in a position to put the final touches to your own story, editing it at the same level of discourse. At this stage it could conceivably be read by others as a real text. One might even envisage it being typed up and used in conjunction with the originals and a number of other similarly created texts: learners could be asked to decide which are the "genuine" ones and why.

ACTIVITY 7

Seven months after this tragic event Maurizio Nobile's case was examined in Rome. What would have been your recommendation if you had been the judge? Fill out the following grid as appropriate.

COGNOME: Nobile

NOME: Maurizio

ETA': 32 anni

INDIRIZZO: Via Scocca, 28, Roma.

ACCUSATO DI: Omicidio volontario di Ernesto Chiovini, bidello.

13 marzo, 1984. Scuola Media Ignazio Silone.

DECISIONE DEI GIUDICI:

LIBERTA':

PRIGIONE:

OSPEDALE
PSICHIATRICO:

MORTE:

Per quanto tempo?

Ragioni della
decisione:

Now compare your judgement with that of the judge, reported in *Corriere della Sera* of 31 October 1984:

31 Ottobre 1984

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

L'uomo che uccise il bidello non sarà processato: è folle

Maurizio Nobile, l'uomo che il 13 marzo scorso sequestrò 15 ragazzi della scuola media «Ignazio Silone» dopo avere ucciso con una fucilata il bidello Ernesto Chiovini, non sarà processato ma dovrà restare per almeno dieci anni in un ospedale psichiatrico. Lo ha deciso il giudice istruttore Stefano Meschini a conclusione dell'inchiesta. Maurizio Nobile non è punibile per l'accusa di omicidio volontario in quanto al momento del delitto era totalmente incapace di intendere e volere. La convinzione del magistrato è basata sui risultati di una perizia d'ufficio compiuta dal professor Gaspare Vella.

COMMENTARY

So far we have done no more than deal with facts. This activity allows us to react to the facts, to judge for ourselves the rights and wrongs of the event. We give a personal response. We read the text with a different purpose, one that is much more meaningful and perhaps of much more real educational value than anything we have done before. This is surely the direction in which we should be moving in language teaching and learning. Incidentally, at this stage we should have all the linguistic knowledge we require to cope with the text, though perhaps not enough to be able to elaborate our response.

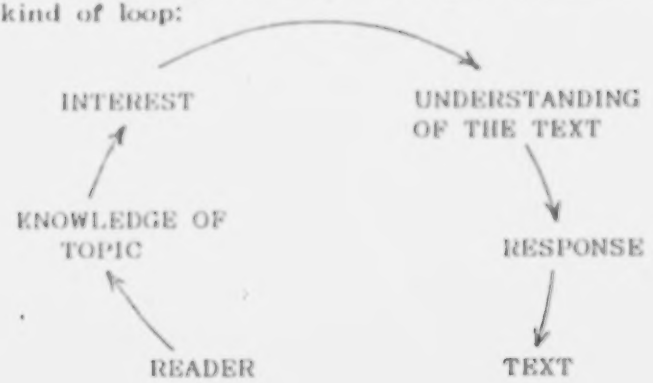
2.4 Interaction between reader and text

The process materials illustrated above were designed for a specific set of content material and with a specific type of learner in mind: beginning learners of Italian. It was presumed that they had no knowledge of Italian whatsoever and no prior knowledge of the incident in question[12]. The concept and design of the process materials were such as to encourage these particular learners to use the resources immediately available to them to cope with these particular texts. The materials sought to activate these resources; they did not try to solve the problems for the learner, but rather provided him with the means of solving problems for himself.

It was possible to design the process materials precisely because there were specific texts and specific readers in mind. The normal interaction between reader and text is not a linear one:

READER ======>>>>======>>>> TEXT

but rather a cyclical one. We might illustrate it by a kind of loop:

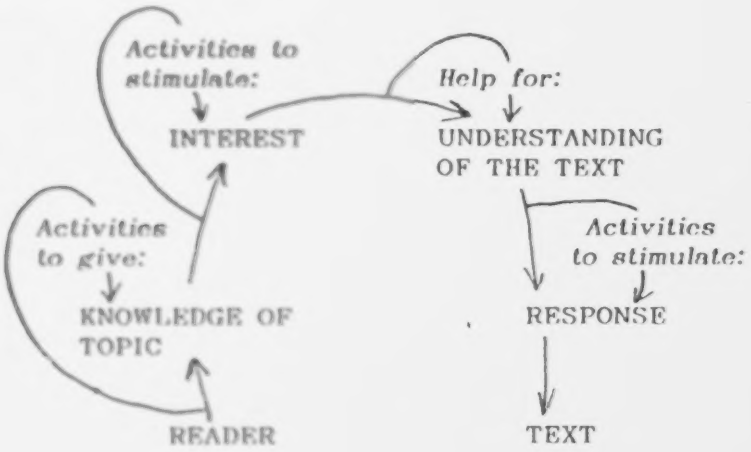


At various points in this loop there is the possibility of breakdown, even for the reader in L1. We do not normally read things about which we know nothing or in which we are not interested. Researchers into the teaching of reading in L1 stress the fact that prior knowledge frequently needs to be established before children can cope with texts (see Tierney and Cunningham 1984, p 612 for an overview of this research). We have seen that the same may need to be done for L2. Similarly, interest may need to be stimulated; help may be required for the understanding of specific elements of the text; the personal response of the reader to the text may on occasion need to be stimulated. Thus the problems that texts pose for the reader or listener can be broken down into various areas and help provided precisely at those points where it is necessary.

I suggest that we look on this type of help as a series of mini-loops which allow the major loop to be completed. In other words, instead of allowing oneself to be blocked by a difficulty, one learns how to go round it. Not all the mini-loops are necessary for all texts or for all readers. What is

essential is that they be available for those who need them, as and when they need them, otherwise the major loop of interaction with the text will not be possible.

The activities specifically designed for language improvement should exist outside these loops (they might constitute one or more additional mini-loops). It seems to me that such activities occur most appropriately at the "understanding of the text" stage; though, as we have seen, the language is being learned at all stages. The whole process might thus be illustrated as follows:



The exercises and activities designed for the Italian texts above offer the maximum help-level to the reader/listener. Ideally there should be a range of help-levels available to readers/listeners just as there is with many computer programmes. This would allow the reader/listener to avail himself of help at the appropriate level and time. This ideal is still some way from being realised. The difficulties are obvious: readers/listeners differ

from one another in (i) knowledge of the topic, (ii) knowledge of the discourse type, and (iii) knowledge of the language; in addition, they have different interests, motivation, attitudes, intellectual abilities. Texts also differ in the difficulty of their content, in the complexity of their discourse structure, in their linguistic level, and in their manner of presentation. Matching process materials to content materials must take this diversity into account. Ideally, therefore, process materials should be designed by individual teachers who know their learners well and who are able to estimate the sources of difficulty in particular texts for their own learners.

This is not such an awesome task as it might at first appear. For example, it is quite conceivable that many of the activities and exercises suggested here for the Italian texts could be used for learners with four or five years of Italian. Of course, this would involve a certain amount of adaptation, and one would expect somewhat different outcomes. Furthermore, some of the activities might be analysed to provide algorithms that could be used with other texts and other learners. This would be particularly the case with the initial set of activities. There are, of course, many other exercise types (see, for example, Candlin 1981); and there are excellent collections of practical suggestions for such activities in, for example, Grellet 1981 and Nuttall 1982. It is up to teachers to adapt these and other suggestions to the needs of their own classes. More independence on the part of teachers would be a welcome development: we have too long been tying ourselves too closely to the texts and exercises of particular course-books and anthologies.

3 THE AUTHENTIK PROJECT

The AUTHENTIK Modern Languages Project attempts to provide learners of second and foreign languages in Britain and Ireland with a regular supply of content materials, accompanied by process materials designed for a certain category of learner. Situated in Trinity College, Dublin, and involving the cooperation of a wide range of interested bodies (language teachers' associations, university language departments, the cultural services and institutes of the relevant embassies), the project produces newspapers and audio cassettes in four languages: French, German, Irish[13] and Spanish. The newspapers are made up of unaltered extracts from the press of the countries where the languages in question are spoken; the cassettes contain radio broadcasts which match closely the items in the newspapers. There is a full transcript for the cassettes, and process materials for both newspapers and cassettes.

The content materials cover a wide range of topics, - international and national news, human interest, sport, music, fashion, etc. They are chosen from as wide a variety of sources as possible, representing all shades of political opinion and all "qualities" of production. The prime criterion for selection of content material is that it should be of interest to readers/listeners in the 15 to 20 age bracket. Much of what appears is about topics already familiar to readers/listeners, the principle being that they can go from the known to the unknown. In practice, the materials are used by readers/listeners of all ages and professions.

The process materials are conceived for a particular category of reader. It was decided to focus on the weaker learner with three to four years' experience of learning the language in the class-

room. This type of learner is our "average reader/listener". The content material is first graded globally in terms of its potential difficulty for this average learner. What would be understandable by him/her is graded as ***, and other items are graded, as appropriate, on a scale from * to *****. Items graded as * or ** are considered not to need support at the level of comprehension, but other activities might be designed for them. Items graded as ***, **** or ***** are reckoned to need different levels of support.

The material is analysed in detail to try to isolate the precise area of difficulty. The difficulties may be of any type, but they are usually categorised in terms of the three types of knowledge we have frequently referred to in this paper: (i) difficulties related to content or topic, which arise from the learner's lack of world knowledge; (ii) difficulties related to the way the text is structured, which arise from the learner's lack of familiarity with the discourse structure in question; (iii) linguistic difficulties (morphology, syntax, etc.), which arise from the learner's lack of linguistic knowledge.

Process materials are then designed focussing on these precise areas of difficulty. Their aim is to enable the readers/listeners to get around the difficulties and so to cope on their own with the content materials, to read or listen to the foreign language for pleasure.

AUTHENTIK has had to limit the focus of its process materials to the type of learner indicated above, since it was initially conceived for this public. In identifiying this learner and his/her needs it depends on the experience of practising teachers. AUTHENTIK is, however, designed by Irish teachers for Irish learners. An attempt is

made to cope for readers/listeners in Britain by producing a special British edition, which differs from the Irish edition only in the pages dealing with national news. To cater adequately for British learners, British teachers should be involved in the production and design of the process materials. This is envisaged in the long term, as is a similar development for learners in other countries. Similarly, to cater for learners in other categories, (adults, younger children, beginners, advanced learners, etc.) special process materials need to be designed. Within a project of this kind, this should eventually be possible.

Such a project acts as a bridge between the learner of a foreign language in his or her home country and the press, radio and television of the foreign country. As was indicated in the opening paragraph, the full adult diet of media in the foreign language has been considered to be beyond the digestive capabilities of learners in the early stages. A carefully selected menu, such as that described here, constantly renewed and properly prepared, can be made available from the very beginning of the learning process and can allow the linguistic system of the learner to develop healthily to the point of full independence.

It should be pointed out, finally, that such materials as are produced by AUTHENTIK are largely "throw-away", disposable, with little lasting value in themselves. There is no reason why other types of texts, including pedagogical and literary texts, should not also form part of the diet of the learner from the very beginning. A little reflection will show how feasible this is. Such a variation in the menu can only lead to still healthier linguistic development, provided the same basic principles are adhered to.

NOTES

1. See especially the work of Dulay and Burt referred to below.

2. These findings about definable stages in language acquisition are now well documented, though not all researchers accept either the definition of the stages as given by Brown or their delimitations (see, for example, Garman 1979). Brown himself cautions the reader about the transferability of the findings about the acquisition of word order and of morphology to other languages besides English (see Brown 1973, p.404). The Berkeley Project directed by Dan Slobin is currently investigating first language acquisition across a wide spectrum of languages. See Slobin 1982 for a clarification of which aspects of this order might be specific to the acquisition of English. This should help to put Brown's work on the acquisition of English as an L1 into a proper perspective.

3. Many researchers in this area take issue with the use of the term "order of acquisition", prefering to refer to an "order of accuracy". See, for example, Andersen 1977, p.55.

4. For a full treatment of recent research in second language acquisition, see Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, Wode 1981, Ellis 1985.

5. Because of the nature of these research findings, there may be a tendency to believe that language acquisition proceeds in some kind of linear fashion. This is expressly warned against, for example by Meisel 1983, p.243.

6. The terms "vertical structure" and "horizontal structure" come from Scollon 1974 as quoted in Hatch 1978a, p.141.

7. The first two types of knowledge above might be called "content schemata" and "formal schemata" respectively. (See Carrell 1983b, p.83). Content schemata are also known as "frames" (Minsky 1975, Fillmore 1976), "scripts" (Schank and Abelson 1977) or "scenarios" (Sanford and Garrod 1981).

8. Most children have a second source of linguistic input, their peers. In conversations with other children the range of speech acts is much wider and the rules for conversations quite different (see Peck 1978). Hatch 1978b sums up the two types of input available to a child acquiring a second language:

   It would seem that the child has, indeed, the best of both worlds in terms of language learning opportunity. He gets chances of controlled input, with vocabulary made clear from the context, in conversations with adults, and he gets a chance to practise 15 repetitions in a row if he wishes when playing with other children. (p.153)

9. "Adult" here is taken to include anyone over the age of about 12 years.

10. Schumann 1975 discusses this problem of the adult as a child in the foreign language environment and the need for a support system or family within the community.

11. Since it is some time now since the events recounted here happened, it may be worth

summarising them briefly. Mr. Don Tidey, managing director of the Quinnsworth chain of supermarkets, was kidnapped in late 1983 by the IRA and a ransom note was sent to other directors. After some time the Gardai got a tip-off and surrounded the town of Ballinamore in Co. Leitrim, near the border with Northern Ireland. In the ensuing skirmish, Don Tidey was freed, but the kidnappers got away. A soldier and a Garda cadet were killed.

12. This assumption was not totally justified. We have already mentioned the fact that they would have had a knowledge of the world which gave a general framework for the story. They would have been able to recognise some of the Italian words in the texts from their knowledge of English or of other European languages. There is, however, no reason to pretend that this knowledge does not exist.

13. The Irish edition is slightly different to the others in that it has to depend for its material on a very narrow range of sources. It therefore consists of (i) a thematic supplement for the only Sunday newspaper to appear in Irish and (ii) readers' notes (process materials) for both newspaper and supplement. As yet there is no tape available.

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